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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 004381

SIPDIS

STATE PASS AIT/W

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/24/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: TAIWAN'S PEOPLE'S FIRST PARTY: SNAPSHOT OF A PARTY
IN DECLINE

Classified By: AIT Acting Director David J. Keegan
Reason(s): 1.4 (B/D)

1. (C) SUMMARY: THE WEAKENED AND DEMORALIZED PEOPLE'S FIRST PARTY (PFP) APPEARS SET TO SLIP FURTHER IN POLITICAL INFLUENCE IN THE UPCOMING DECEMBER LOCAL ELECTIONS. WITH JUST ONE LIKELY AND ONE POSSIBLE ELECTION VICTORY, THE PFP WILL BE FURTHER MARGINALIZED AND ITS FUTURE FURTHER CLOUDED. CHAIRMAN JAMES SOONG SHOWS NO SIGNS OF MOVING TO STOP THE PARTY'S SLIDE THROUGH COOPERATION WITH ITS SOMETIME PAN-BLUE COALITION PARTNER, THE KUOMINTANG PARTY (KMT). ON THE CONTRARY, SOONG'S RECENT TRIAL BALLOONS HINTING AT HIS RUNNING IN NEXT YEAR'S TAIPEI MAYORAL RACE ARE SEEN AS A CHALLENGE TO KMT CHAIRMAN MA YING-JEOU'S 2008 PRESIDENTIAL AMBITIONS AND DRIVE THE TWO PARTIES FURTHER APART, TO THE PFP'S DISADVANTAGE. END SUMMARY.

PFP'S LONG SLIDE

2. (U) THE PFP HAS DECLINED STEADILY IN PUBLIC SUPPORT, FROM 18 PERCENT AT ITS FOUNDING IN 2000 TO 5 PERCENT IN THE MOST RECENT SURVEY (COMPARED WITH THE KMT'S REVERSE TREND FROM 15 TO 29 PERCENT IN THE SAME PERIOD). WHEN EFFORTS TO MERGE PFP AND KMT FAILED, PFP'S VOTE SHARE IN THE DECEMBER 2004 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS DECLINED TO 14 PERCENT, DOWN FROM 19 PERCENT IN 2001. PFP CHAIRMAN JAMES SOONG'S EFFORTS TO RESUSCITATE THE PARTY THIS YEAR INCLUDING HIS SHORT-LIVED ALLIANCE WITH PRESIDENT CHEN SHUI-BIAN IN FEBRUARY AND HIS MAY VISIT TO MAINLAND CHINA, ALSO FAILED TO HALT THE PARTY'S SLIDE. IN MAY, THE PFP FINISHED LAST IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS WITH JUST 6 PERCENT OF THE VOTE. THE GROWING DEMORALIZATION AMONG THE PFP MEMBERSHIP WAS REFLECTED IN THREE HIGHLY PUBLICIZED DESERTIONS TO THE KMT, INCLUDING THAT OF POPULAR PFP LEGISLATOR CHOU HSI-WEI, WHO REJOINED THE KMT AND RECEIVED THE KMT NOMINATION IN THE ALL-IMPORTANT DECEMBER TAIPEI COUNTY MAGISTRATE ELECTION.

DECEMBER ELECTIONS: ALL HOPES ON KEELUNG

3. (C) PFP DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS LIAO WEN-CHANG TOLD AIT THAT THE PAN-BLUE CAMP WILL BE THE BIG WINNER IN THE DECEMBER 3 YEAR-END ELECTIONS. HE WAS, HOWEVER, PESSIMISTIC OVER HIS OWN PFP'S ELECTION PROSPECTS. IN AUGUST, LIAO HAD TOLD AIT THAT IF THE KMT REFUSED TO YIELD FIVE OR SIX KEY ELECTIONS TO PFP CANDIDATES, THE PFP WOULD BE FORCED TO FIGHT FOR ITS VERY SURVIVAL. THE TWO PARTIES, IN FACT, WERE UNABLE TO AGREE ON CANDIDATES IN ANY OF THE KEY RACES, INCLUDING KEELUNG AND TAICHUNG CITIES AND HUALIEN AND MIAOLI COUNTIES. LIAO TOLD AIT THAT OF THE FOUR DISTRICTS WHERE PFP CANDIDATES ARE RUNNING, THE PFP WILL LIKELY WIN ONLY LIENCHIANG COUNTY (MATSU ISLAND), HAS A REASONABLE CHANCE OF WINNING KEELUNG CITY, AND HAS NO CHANCE OF WINNING IN EITHER TAICHUNG CITY OR HUALIEN COUNTY. (NOTE: CURRENTLY, THE PFP ONLY CONTROLS MATSU. END NOTE.)

4. (C) LIAO BECAME UPBEAT AND HOPEFUL ONLY WHEN TALK TURNED TO THE KEELUNG CITY MAYOR'S RACE, WHERE PFP LEGISLATOR LIU WEN-HSIUNG HAS A RAZOR-THIN THREE-POINT LEAD OVER INCUMBENT KMT MAYOR HSU TSAI-LI, ACCORDING TO SOME POLLS. THE KEELUNG RACE, LIAO TOLD AIT, IS CRITICAL TO THE PFP SINCE IT IS THE PARTY'S ONLY CHANCE FOR A BIG WIN BY UNSEATING THE KMT INCUMBENT CANDIDATE HSU. IF THE PFP LOSES KEELUNG CITY, LIAO NOTED, "ALL IS LOST". HE EXPLAINED THAT THE PFP'S ONLY ELECTION STRATEGY FOR KEELUNG IS TO TRY TO PERSUADE TAIPEI MAYOR MA YING-JEOU NOT TO VISIT KEELUNG AND CAMPAIGN FOR KMT CANDIDATE HSU, OR AT LEAST TO MINIMIZE HIS VISITS TO KEELUNG CITY. THIS COULD ONLY HAPPEN THROUGH VERY QUIET DIPLOMACY, LIAO NOTED, AND KMT CANDIDATE HSU MUST NEVER LEARN OF SUCH A DEAL. (COMMENT: THE PFP STRATEGY IS NOT WORKING. MA HAS BEEN VISITING KEELUNG TO SUPPORT MAYOR HSU, AND THE KMT IN KEELUNG IS HIGHLIGHTING THE STRONG CONNECTION BETWEEN MA AND HSU. END COMMENT.)

OTHER RACES

5. (C) PFP CHAIRMAN JAMES SOONG, LIAO TOLD AIT, WILL VISIT KEELUNG CITY AND HUALIEN COUNTY TO CAMPAIGN FOR PFP

CANDIDATES. SOONG IS LARGELY INDIFFERENT TO THE LOWER LEVEL RACES FOR COUNTY AND CITY COUNCILORS AND TOWN MAGISTRATES, LIAO LAMENTED, NOTING THAT THESE OFFER THE BEST CHANCE FOR THE PFP TO WIN ELECTIONS AND, THUS, KEEP THE PARTY ALIVE. LIAO HIMSELF WILL TRAVEL TO HUALIEN COUNTY, KEELUNG CITY, AND TAINAN CITY AND COUNTY TO MOBILIZE SUPPORT FOR CANDIDATES AT THE COUNCIL LEVEL. THROUGHOUT THE CONVERSATION, LIAO WONDERED ALOUD ABOUT THE PFP'S FATE, EXPRESSED THE NEED FOR THE PFP TO COLLABORATE MORE CLOSELY WITH THE KMT AND SEEMED RESIGNED TO A DISMAL FUTURE FOR THE PARTY.

SOONG'S OWN POLITICAL ASPIRATIONS

16. (C) LIAO CONFIRMED TO AIT THAT CHAIRMAN SOONG IS SERIOUSLY ASSESSING HIS OPTIONS FOR A POSSIBLE RUN IN NEXT YEAR'S TAIPEI CITY MAYORAL RACE. KMT CHAIRMAN MA YING-JEOU, HE NOTED, WOULD NOT BE AT ALL PLEASED WITH OR SUPPORTIVE OF ANY PLAN THAT MIGHT PUT SOONG IN DIRECT COMPETITION WITH MA FOR THE 2008 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. LIAO, HOWEVER, ACKNOWLEDGED THAT SOONG WOULD NEED KMT SUPPORT FOR A MAYORAL BID, OTHERWISE HE COULD END UP IN A RE-PLAY OF HIS FAILED 2000 PRESIDENTIAL BID, WHICH SPLIT THE PAN-BLUE VOTE AND GAVE THE ELECTION TO DPP'S CHEN SHUI-BIAN. LIAO, NEVERTHELESS, WAS SKEPTICAL THIS WOULD HAPPEN, SINCE SOONG AND MA ARE CURRENTLY AT ODDS AND NOT COMMUNICATING WITH EACH OTHER. KEEGAN